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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2439
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3029
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000168

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ABA-CEELI LOOKS TO EXPAND PROGRAMS

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Two ABA-CEELI staff attorneys recently provided an overview of their organization's past and present activities in Turkmenistan, as well as possible future endeavors. With a ten year in-country track record, ABA-CEELI has most recently been involved in providing free legal consultations and conducting workshops on social advocacy. With these programs due to end soon the organization has been looking for new partners and projects. Options include legal advice for entrepreneurs and legal training for government officials involving international standards on various topics. ABA-CEELI's current approach includes finding local partners and working with government officials to develop future programs. END SUMMARY.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT CREATED SUSTAINABLE LEGACY

12. (C) According to Senior Staff Attorney, Seyran Soltanov, ABA-CEELI has worked in Turkmenistan since 1999 when it began a program to develop the law library at Turkmen State University. Its current activity involves work with Counterpart International to implement the legal assistance component of the USAID-funded Community Empowerment Program. The three-year program will wrap up in July 2009. Through the program, ABA-CEELI provided legal training for community-based lawyers and community leaders at three resource centers in Ashgabat, Turkmenabat and Dashoguz. The program also created a database of Turkmenistan legislation and continues to conduct pro bono legal consultations and hot line consultations for a largely rural population. The main legal topics covered are water use, land use and civil law issues. The program employs 11 lawyers, three of whom are located in Counterpart Civil Society Support Centers, three more co-located with local partner organizations, and the remaining functioning as circuit lawyers that visit the 50 communities served by the Community Empowerment Program. Legal services initially included representation in court, but upon implementation a referral system was developed to assist people to find lawyers. Following conclusion of the program, some of the program lawyers will continue providing legal services in affiliation with the Counterpart support centers and the partner organizations.

SOCIAL ADVOCACY TRAINING SOUGHT TO RAISE RIGHTS AWARENESS

13. (C) Staff Attorney, Elnara Agaeva, described the DRL-funded Social Advocate Program that ABA has been implementing since 2006. The goal of the program was to train social advocates by raising the level of knowledge about the law among non-lawyers, particularly in the areas of domestic violence and child abuse. The training was also meant to raise people's awareness of their rights and the government's role. Agaeva pointed out that training usually took place in Ashgabat, with attendees from throughout Turkmenistan. ABA-CEELI was largely unable to obtain authorization for training in the provinces. The training was publicized through announcements posted in State Department-supported American Corners located in university libraries, and through organizations such as Counterpart International and American Councils for International Education (ACCELS). Agaeva said that training went smoothly during the first 1-1/2 years of the program, after which ABA-CEELI was not able to get government authorization to conduct children's camps and training in Ashgabat for children's advocates. She could not offer any views on why the project derailed.

LOOKING AHEAD: COOPERATIVE PROJECTS

14. (C) For a proposed project to provide legal advice to entrepreneurs, ABA is partnering with the Union of Entrepreneurs and the local Chamber of Commerce. Agaeva said ABA met with the Entrepreneurs Union and together they developed a project to help members navigate potential problems in dealing with the government. She suggested that

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a program focused on entrepreneurs could cover a broad range of business-related legislation. In order to move ahead on this project, ABA-CEELI needs to locate a funding source.

15. (C) ABA-CEELI staff had also met with representatives of the General Prosecutor's Office, the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Parliament (Mejlis) to gauge their needs and interest in cooperation. In meetings with these officials, ABA-CEELI explained its continuous presence and programs in Turkmenistan. Many of the officials had encountered ABA-CEELI through contact with its previous projects. There was general interest in legal training, seminars and workshops that would increase knowledge of international practices. The Prosecutor General's office mentioned extradition issues and U.S. arbitration experience. The Supreme Court expressed interest in exchanges of experience. Funding for government training still needs to be located.

16. (C) COMMENT: Given the lamentable state of knowledge about and respect for legal rights in Turkmenistan, ABA-CEELI could offer a lot in terms of raising the level of legal literacy. While the organization appears undaunted by difficulties it encountered in implementing its social advocacy program, it seems to have learned a lesson as it now seeks partners and government input in planning future projects. END COMMENT.
MILES